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Foreword

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This is truly brilliant book. In the twenty-first-century medical environment, driven by the dual pulls of high costs and cost effectiveness. Patients can get submerged in technology, protocols, and paperwork, to the extent they lose their humanity and experience themselves as a case number, not a person. This book highlights the challenge medical teams, having a plethora of scientific knowledge, encounter every day when faced with the uniquely human problems of each individual patient. Its guidance puts the heart back into medicine.

My experience with families whose children have died has taught me that, even when medicine fails as tragically as when a child dies, how the family is responded to at the time has a life-long impact on that family, for good or ill. Every conversation, every decision, every gesture is burned in their memory for life. Often the unforgivable errors are more to do with the lack of attuned care than with medicine: not enough proper reflection on the needs of this family, careless assumptions made, insensitive communication, which might be appropriate for another family, but is received with fury by this particular family, too much haste to get “it over with.” Any medical professional

reading this book is given both a map and a way of thinking which protects against these all too frequent irrevocable mistakes, and ensures the family receives the best possible care at such a difficult time.

The coherence with which the authors unpick complex and usually intangible, as well as explicit, situations is extraordinary. They keep the same themes running throughout the text, linking and reinforcing them with each case study, giving their arguments a lot of weight. I was fascinated by the different scenarios, which echoed some of my own experiences with patients and made the text come alive and easy to read. They intentionally didn't describe the “nightmare” examples where bad practice, bad stories, and bad outcomes come together, recognizing that it is the more subtle everyday situation that is the key learning in this book, because it is from them that individual patients receive genuine person-centered care.

This book is a hugely welcome clarion call back to the essential values in medicine, that keys into the natural motivation of most doctors, to reach out to the individual patient and make a difference. It is a very impressive book, and I couldn't be more delighted to endorse the importance and value of its messages.